## FOUR CRITICAL ACTIONS FOR SCHOOLS

# Responding to Incidents, Disclosures and Suspicions of Child Abuse

### YOU MUST TAKE ACTION

As a school staff member, you play a **critical role** in protecting children in your care.

- You **must** act, by following the Four Critical Actions, as soon as you witness an incident, receive a disclosure or form a reasonable belief * that a child has, or is at risk of being abused.
- You **must** act if you form a suspicion/ reasonable belief, even if you are unsure and have not directly observed child abuse (e.g. if the victim or another person tells you about the abuse).
- It is strongly recommended that you use the ***Responding to Suspected Child Abuse template*** to keep clear and comprehensive notes, even if you make a decision not to report.

** A reasonable belief is a deliberately low threshold. This enables authorities to investigate and take action.*

## 1 RESPONDING TO AN EMERGENCY

If there is no risk of immediate harm go to **Action 2**.

If a child is at immediate risk of harm you **must** ensure their safety by:

- separating alleged victims and others involved
- administering first aid
- calling **000 for urgent medical and/ or police assistance** to respond to immediate health or safety concerns
- identifying a contact person at the school for future liaison with Police.

Where necessary you may also need to maintain the integrity of the potential crime scene and preserve evidence.

## 2 REPORTING TO AUTHORITIES / REFERRING TO SERVICES

As soon as immediate health and safety concerns are addressed you **must** report all incidents, suspicions and disclosures of child abuse as soon as possible. Failure to report physical and sexual child abuse may amount to a criminal offence.

*Q: Where does the source of suspected abuse come from?*

### WITHIN THE SCHOOL

#### VICTORIA POLICE

You **must** report all instances of suspected child abuse involving a school staff member, contractor, volunteer or visitor to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **internally** to:

#### GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or leadership team
- Employee Conduct Branch
- DET Incident Support and Operations Centre.

#### CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office.

#### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or school chairperson
- Commission for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978**.

All allegations of 'reportable conduct' **must** be reported as soon as possible to:

#### GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

- Employee Conduct Branch

#### CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- Diocesan education office

#### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- Commission for Children and Young People on **1300 782 978.**

### WITHIN THE FAMILY OR COMMUNITY

#### DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

You **must** report to DHHS Child Protection if a child is considered to be:

- in need of protection from child abuse
- at risk of being harmed (or has been harmed) and the harm has had, or is likely to have, a serious impact on the child's safety, stability or development.

#### VICTORIA POLICE

You **must also** report all instances of suspected sexual abuse (including grooming) to Victoria Police.

You **must also** report **internally** to:

#### GOVERNMENT SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or leadership team
- DET Incident Support and Operations Centre.

#### CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or leadership team
- Diocesan education office.

#### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS

- School principal and/or chairperson.

For suspected student sexual assault, please follow the **Four Critical Actions: Student Sexual Offending.**

### OTHER CONCERNS

If you believe that a child is not subject to abuse, but you still hold **significant concerns** for their wellbeing you **must** still act. This may include making a referral or seeking advice from:

- Child FIRST/The Orange Door (in circumstances where the family are open to receiving support)
- DHHS Child Protection
- Victoria Police.

## 3 CONTACTING PARENTS/CARERS

Your principal **must** consult with DHHS Child Protection or Victoria Police to determine what information can be shared with parents/carers. They may advise:

- **not to contact** the parents/carer (e.g. in circumstances where the parents are alleged to have engaged in the abuse, or the child is a mature minor and does not wish for their parent/carer to be contacted)
- **to contact** the parents/carers and provide agreed information (this must be done as soon as possible, preferably on the same day of the incident, disclosure or suspicion)
- **how to communicate** with all relevant parties with consideration for their safety.

## 4 PROVIDING ONGOING SUPPORT

Your school **must** provide support for children impacted by abuse. This should include the development of a ***Student Support Plan*** in consultation with wellbeing professionals. This is an essential part of your duty of care requirements.

Strategies may include development of a safety plan, direct support and referral to wellbeing professionals and support.

You **must** follow the **Four Critical Actions** every time you become aware of a further instance or risk of abuse. This includes reporting new information to authorities.

## CONTACT

### DHHS CHILD PROTECTION

***AREA***

North Division **1300 664 977**
South Division **1300 655 795**
East Division **1300 360 391**
West Division (Rural) **1800 075 599**
West Division (Metro) **1300 664 977**

***AFTER HOURS***

After hours, weekends, public holidays **13 12 78**.

### CHILD FIRST

https://services.dhhs.vic.gov.au/referral-and-support-teams

### ORANGE DOOR

https://www.vic.gov.au/familyviolence/the-orange-door.html

### VICTORIA POLICE

**000** or your local police station

### DET INCIDENT SUPPORT AND OPERATIONS CENTRE

**1800 126 126**

### INCIDENT MANAGEMENT AND SUPPORT UNIT

**1800 126 126**

### EMPLOYEE CONDUCT BRANCH

**(03) 9637 2595**

### DIOCESAN OFFICE

Melbourne **(03) 9267 0228**
Ballarat **(03) 5337 7135**
Sale **(03) 5622 6600**
Sandhurst **(03) 5443 2377**

### INDEPENDENT SCHOOLS VICTORIA

**(03) 9825 7200**

### THE LOOKOUT

The LOOKOUT has a service directory, information, and evidence based guidance to help you respond to family violence: http://www.lookout.org.au.

Family violence victims/survivors can be referred to **1800 Respect** for counselling, information and a referral service: **1800 737 732**.

PROTECT